

LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 DECEMBER 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Thursday, 6 December 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors M. Bateman, A. Bragg, I.A. Dunbar, R. Hampson, S. Jones, C. Legg, P. R. Lightfoot, D.I. Mackie, N. Matthews, P. Shotton, N. Steele-Mortimer and C.A. Thomas.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mr. D. Hytch and Mrs C. Burgess.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors P.J. Curtis, H.T. Isherwood and P.G. Heesom

APOLOGIES: Councillors A.J. Davies-Cooke, Mrs. R. Price and Mrs. R. Stark. Chief Executive

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Education, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Development and Resources, Head of Culture and Leisure, Advisor for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing, Finance Manager, Arts, Culture and Events Manager, and Mr Will Pierce Energy Manager (minute no.36)

IN ATTENDANCE: Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

The Chairman advised Members of the need to declare a personal interest in school related items on the agenda if they were school or college governors. All Members present except Councillors C. Bithell, A. Bragg, R.G. Hampson, P.Shotton, I.A. Dunbar and P.R. Lightfoot (who were not school governors) declared an interest as school governors.

28. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 12 July 2012 and 20 September 2012 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

29. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that there would be a change in the order of the agenda and the item on the Regional School Effectiveness and

Improvement Service (RSEIS) Update would be brought forward. The remainder of the agenda would then follow in the usual order.

30. REGIONAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT SERVICE (RSEIS) UPDATE

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to update on progress in developing the new Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service.

The Director provided background information and advised that the North Wales school improvement approach had been in place since September 2012 with all structures scheduled to be fully operational from 1 April 2013. Consortia readiness to deliver school improvement outcomes was currently being assessed by consultants commissioned by the Welsh Government. The findings would influence a national review of structures.

During discussion the Director responded to the questions and concerns raised by Members regarding scrutiny arrangements, the process for appointment of Chief Officer and System Leaders, curriculum advice, and school modernisation.

The Director informed Members that Mrs J Dickens would be retiring at the end of December 2012. It was agreed that a letter be sent to Mrs. Dickens by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee to express thanks for her hard work and best wishes for her retirement.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update be noted; and
- (b) That a letter be sent to Mrs. Dickens by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee to express thanks for her hard work and best wishes for her retirement.

31. ESTYN LAESCYP INSPECTION – SELF EVALUATION

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced a report to seek Member contributions to the draft 2012 self-evaluation of Local Authority Education Services for Children and Young People.

The Director advised that self evaluation was based on a wide range of information about strengths and areas for improvement which was collected throughout the year. Referring to the 2012 draft Self Evaluation which was attached to the report he summarised that the key message from last year in terms of pupil achievement and attainment, continued to be good at KS3 and amongst the best at KS4. Although improving, Primary KS2 teacher assessments outcomes were not as good as they should be and too many primary schools were a cause of concern for the Authority. Standards in secondary schools were good and no secondary or special schools were

causing concern. Attendance was up and the number of permanent exclusions down.

The Director advised that Flintshire had achieved the best set of outcomes in Wales for participation 16+ with the lowest number of 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETS). However, whilst the outcomes were positive, the Authority was not complacent and he commented on the need to create more apprenticeship and employment opportunities. He added that in terms of informal learning the Duke of Edinburgh Award participation had increased significantly in Flintshire in the last year.

Councillor D.I. Mackie asked how standards in literacy and numeracy were being improved in some primary schools. In his response the Director referred to the literacy and numeracy strategies in place locally and nationally as well as the specific interventions in any school causing concern. He provided reassurance that primary strategies were most successful where carefully applied to the assessed development needs of the learner.

During discussion the Director responded to the further questions raised by Members concerning the Foundation Phase, support for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), the Welsh Bacalaureate, support for Welsh medium schools, and healthy schools initiative.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

32. FLINTSHIRE ARTS STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed Ms Gwenno Jones, Arts, Culture and Events Manager, to the meeting and invited her to update Members on progress with the Flintshire Arts Strategy.

The Arts, Culture and Events Manager outlined the purpose of the strategy and advised that all aims and objectives had been achieved. The current strategy covered the period 2008 to 2013 and progress to date on the actions identified in the strategy were summarised in the appendix to the report. She advised that a new strategy would be developed in January 2013 to inform future developments.

Councillor C.A Thomas commented on the excellent work undertaken by the Flintshire Arts Team and suggested there was a need for more marketing to raise awareness of the arts activities and services provided within the community and Flintshire schools.

In response to a question from the Chairman about the support available for any scheme drawn up to improve cultural tourism, the Arts, Culture and Events Manager advised that contributions varied and referred to the current budget.

Members commended Officers on their hard work and excellent achievements within the limited resources available.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

33. EXCLUSIONS FROM SCHOOLS UPDATE – PRIMARY AND SECONDARY 2012

The Chairman welcomed Mr. David Messum, Advisor for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing, to the meeting and invited him to present a monitoring report on exclusions from schools.

The Advisor for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing advised that data demonstrated that permanent exclusion from school was a rare occurrence in Flintshire and down to one in 2011/12. He commented on the effective communication between headteachers and the Authority to find an alternative solution to exclusion and outlined the range of strategies of support and interventions to develop the best possible standards of behaviour to promote teaching and learning.

Referring to the data for the number of fixed term and permanently excluded pupils in High schools for 2011/12 the Chairman asked if monitoring took place to ensure schools were consistent in how they applied criteria for exclusion. He also sought assurance that the procedure of using unofficial exclusions from schools did not occur in Flintshire. The Advisor for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing responded that the data presented was robust and confirmed that the use of unauthorised exclusions did not happen in Flintshire schools. He advised that work was in progress to produce guidance for schools to assist them in use and length of applying fixed term exclusions. He advised that evidence confirmed that a short term exclusion was as effective as a long term exclusion.

Councillor P. Lightfoot raised the issue of repeat offenders and asked if he could be supplied with further information regarding this matter. Mr. D. Hytch commented on the need to protect staff from violent or threatening behaviour. In response to the further concerns expressed by Members the Advisor for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing referred to the range of partnership work undertaken with the whole school community, class support, individual support, direct work with parents and pupils, and other forms of intervention to ensure every child and young person received maximum benefit to achieve their potential.

The Cabinet Member for Education commented that those schools who addressed the challenge of supporting pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties were to be commended for their hard work and dedication.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

34. SCHOOL BALANCES

The Chairman introduced Lucy Morris, Finance Manager, and invited her to report to Members on the year end balances of Flintshire Schools and outline the action being taken by Officers to ensure that balances are maintained at an acceptable level.

The individual balances for Flintshire schools at the end of March 2012 were identified in the appendix to the report. The Finance Manager reported on the position for Flintshire schools which showed a decrease of £289k in overall balances. She also referred to a decrease of £318k in Secondary School balances, an increase in Primary School balances of £121k and an increase in Specialist school balances of £7k.

The Finance Manager advised that the Scheme for Financing Schools (section 4 – Treatment of Surpluses and Deficits) had been revised in May 2012 following extensive consultation to ensure a robust approach to dealing with this matter. She referred to the scrutiny of surplus school balances and the issue of licensed deficits and commented on the guidance set out in the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 and the action which should be taken by the Local Authority to address excess school balances.

During discussion concerns were expressed around the fixed limits set out in the Regulations for primary and secondary surplus balances and it was suggested and agreed that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to the Minister to request that the limit for surplus balances for schools be set at 5% of balances rather than a fixed amount.

In response to the further questions and concerns raised by Members the Finance Manager advised that School Fund Accounts were held separately from the schools delegated budget. She explained that the Authority was currently revising regulations for School Fund Accounts to assist schools in managing their private school funds and a report was to be submitted to the Audit Committee shortly to seek regulation of School Fund Accounts.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to the Minister to request that the limit for surplus balances for schools be set at 5% of balances rather than a fixed amount.

35. QUARTER 2 SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The Director introduced a report to request that the Committee consider the 2012/13 Quarter 2 service reports for the period July-September 2012.

Schools' Services

The Director highlighted the key considerations and performance across all work streams and invited Members to submit questions.

In response to a question from Councillor C.A. Thomas concerning the Music Service the Director advised there were no plans to increase charges to parents, however, there was a funding gap in the cost of service provision and he referred to a review of the service to be held next year. Councillor Thomas suggested that the Music Service be included as an item on the forward work programme for future consideration by the Committee.

Development and Resources

The Director gave an update on the school modernisation – area schools review. He reported on the outcomes of consultations based on one preferred option for the Queensferry, Shotton and Connah's Quay Area, Holywell Area, and Buckley, Mynydd Isa and Mold Area. The current period of consultations would close on 21 December 2012. The Director advised that arrangements were also in progress for consultations to be held in the New Year concerning provision for Post 16 education in the Flint and Saltney areas.

Statutory Notice had been published for the proposed closure of Ysgol Rhos y Cae and 2 objections had been received and as a result the proposal had been submitted to the Minister for consideration. The Director also reported on consultation to be undertaken regarding proposals to amalgamate Penyffordd Infants and Junior Schools.

During discussion the Director and Head of Development and Resources responded to questions concerning asset management, mobile classrooms, capital funding, and repair and maintenance of school buildings.

In response to a concern raised by Councillor D.I. Mackie regarding the proposals for sixth form provision in the future the Director advised that the Authority along with others had a strategic decision making responsibility to address Post 16 restructure. The current provision was not appropriate to ensure young people in the County had the breadth of curriculum opportunities that are needed and required by statute.

Culture and Leisure

The Head of Culture and Leisure gave an overview of key messages across work streams in Culture and Leisure highlighted performance in service areas.

Councillor C.A. Thomas referred to match funding for play areas next year. She said Town and Community Councils had received letters notifying them of a reduction in grant funding for Summer play schemes. The Head of Culture and Leisure responded that Town and Community Councils could put in additional funding, or other options included holding schemes over a 3 week period rather than 5 as attendance numbers often dropped off at the end of the school holidays.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

36. SALIX SCHEME

The Chairman invited Councillor H.T. Isherwood to join the Committee to outline her concerns regarding the Salix scheme in schools.

Councillor Isherwood explained that a number of headteachers had signed a loan agreement to go ahead with the scheme without informing their Governing Body as they had mistakenly assumed, due to the wording of the application form, that the applicant was the Authority's Energy Unit. She stated that headteachers were only able to sign agreements if empowered to do so under the School's Scheme of Delegation.

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Mr Will Pierce, Energy Manager, and invited him to respond to the comments and concerns raised by Councillor Isherwood concerning the operation of the Salix and Authority 'spend to save' schemes to support energy reduction in schools. Mr. Pierce advised that the issue raised by Councillor Isherwood had been addressed and the application form for the Salix loan agreement had been amended to also include authorisation by the Chair of Governors. He advised that the Energy Unit had developed a protocol which had just been issued to schools to ensure they had a clear understanding of the scheme prior to signing up. In conclusion Mr Pierce highlighted the positive benefits and savings to be achieved as a result of participating in the scheme which had been successfully operated in Flintshire schools for a number of years.

The Chairman welcomed the fact that a protocol had been drawn up to ensure that headteachers and schools had clarity prior to signing up to the Scheme.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

37. HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

The Head of Culture and Leisure Services introduced a report on accidents and incidents in schools during September 2011 to August 2012 and a summary of the high level actions taken by the Council to support schools in achieving healthy and safe learning environments.

During discussion Officers responded to the questions and concerns raised around the issue of road safety and parental parking outside school gates. Mr. D. Hytch commented on the model Health and Safety policy which was available on the 'moodle' website and said that bilingual provision should also be made available. In response to a question from the Chairman concerning asbestos in school roofing materials, the Director advised that the Authority had a full and active procedure in place for monitoring and addressing evidence of asbestos in schools.

It was agreed that a report on Health and Safety in Schools be submitted to the Committee on an annual basis.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That a report on Health and Safety in Schools be submitted to the Committee on an annual basis.

38. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Learning and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the Forward Work Programme of the Committee. Members reviewed the current programme and agreed that the following items would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on 10 January 2013:

- Leisure Strategy
- Healthy Schools
- Cost of repairs and maintenance – school buildings

It was also agreed that an item on school governance be included on the Forward Work Programme for future consideration by the Committee and that all Members be invited to join the meeting for discussion on the item. An item on the School Music Service would also be scheduled on the Programme for consideration by Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be agreed;
- (b) That an item on school governance be included on the Forward Work Programme for future consideration by the Committee and that all Members be invited to join the meeting for discussion on the item; and

(c) That an item on the School Music Service also be scheduled on the Programme for consideration by Members.

39. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and ended at 5.30 pm.

40. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

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Chairman